



**For immediate release**  
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## **Lewis and Clark County seeing COVID-19 virus community spread**

Helena – Lewis and Clark Public Health is seeing potential community spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in Lewis and Clark County.

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in a given area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. Each County health department determines community spread differently, based on local conditions. In Lewis and Clark County, community spread is based on having patients whose exposure is unknown, meaning it can't be traced back to travel or to contact with a known case.

When a case is reported to LCPH, a team of nurses goes to work immediately to identify close contacts of the individual. A close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone for 15 minutes or more. The LCPH contact tracers are seeing infected individuals with up to 20 contacts each.

Additionally, the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been detected in city sewage, further evidence of community spread. The virus is secreted in stool and the cities of Helena and East Helena have been sampling sewage for the virus since May. A June 30 sample from East Helena identified the presence of genetic fragments of the virus. This is the first time there has been a positive result since sampling began. The sampling, analyzed by BioBot Analytics, Inc., compares known cases of COVID-19 with the concentration of virus genetic fragments in the sewage, then estimates a number of cases. Based on the results of the June 30 sample, there are estimated to have been 15 active cases in the City of East Helena at that time. Officials are still waiting the results of the last sampling from the Helena Wastewater Treatment Plant.

"If people continue to blatantly disregard medical and public health professionals, this virus is going to continue to spread and the situation will get worse," said Drenda Niemann, LCPH Health Officer. "We will see higher numbers, our medical and public health capacities will eventually be overwhelmed, and people will see loved ones die."

As of July 15, 2020, LCPH has investigated 57 total cases. There are currently 36 active cases of COVID and 21 recovered cases. There have been cases in all areas of the County.

LCPH has been working closely with local, state and federal partners, as well as local medical providers, including St. Peter's Health, to respond to this public health threat. Ongoing efforts to contain the spread and mitigate the impact of this virus continue.

LCPH continues to urge people to practice what has been learned over the last few months, such as physical distancing, wearing a face covering, avoiding gatherings, washing hands and sanitizing surfaces to protect self and others.

If you have questions, please call Lewis and Clark Public Health at 406-457-8900.

For more information about COVID-19 visit [www.lccountymt.gov/health/covid-19.html](http://www.lccountymt.gov/health/covid-19.html)

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